



Date: March 9, 2015

To: Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

RE: Committee Bill #5505

Dear Committee:

I am a psychologist who has provided services for the Connecticut Courts. I wish to express my grave concerns for the proposed Bill 5505 and the impact it will have on the process and effectiveness of the work presently offered to the courts. During divorce proceedings, there are times when issues arise that require a psychological evaluation to provide further evidence for the court to determine the best interest of the child. Presently, the system used to select the professional to complete this evaluation ensure quality and experienced psychologists who have proven their ability to offer an unbiased presentation of present functioning and recommendations of each person and the family unit. Bill 5505 has the capacity to hamper, congest, undermine, and ultimately prove useless this process.

Within the Bill 5505, there is a plan to allow parents going through a divorce the opportunity to select their own mental health evaluator for themselves and their children. This may appear positive for each parent. However, the reason the evaluation is ordered relates to the significant difficulty within these cases, the amount of dispute and animosity between the parents, and the impact this has to each of the members of the family unit. Given the hostile and difficult climate, the court may find difficulty assessing the parents to determine which parent may offer the best placement for the child. By asking one impartial and unbiased psychologist to evaluate each person in the family, the assessment provides a clear picture of each family member and their interaction with others. This person is selected from a list of experienced psychologists who have shown clear expertise in the area of forensic evaluations. The psychologist will offer insight into the pressing issues that undermine and support each parents' ability to parent the child. The psychologist has training to assess present functioning, review past functioning, and offer recommendations as to how the best interest of the child will be served by the court. An impartial psychologist is hired for the sole purpose of the issues presented before the court. They have no other function or role for the family. They have no prior relationship or future relationship to the family outside of the evaluation process.


If the parents are given permission to hire mental health providers of their choosing, there are many issues that may have ill effects for the court. If each parent hires their own mental health provider, there will be no unified professional who has seen every member of the family. There may be attempts for each mental health provider to contact other members of the family for input. There may be resistance from each family member for multiple assessments. Many of the measures used by psychologists cannot be used repeatedly within short time frames as they will yield unstable and inaccurate information. Without evaluating all persons within the family unit, the professionals cannot have a clear and full understanding of the issues.

Each parent may also choose to hire their present mental health professional who has worked with them or the child to offer the evaluation. This causes ethical difficulty related to dual relationships for mental health providers. Furthermore, a mental health provider who has a previous relationship with the person within the family has developed a hypothesis regarding issues with the family member. Thus, they are not unbiased in their interpretation of events and have a focused view of the issues related to how their client has reported the events. The professional may also have concerns related to their relationship with their client and maintaining rapport beyond the court matter. As such, they may choose to report only elements that will support their client's position in an effort to retain their client post the court case. This will undermine the needs of the court.

In addition to these issues, there is also great concern that the parents will have difficulty assessing the caliber of the mental health professional they wish to hire to provide the extremely complicated work necessary for these evaluations. If given the opportunity to hire any mental health professional, the parents may not understand the need to hire professionals in the community with experience, clear evidence of knowledge and training in the field of forensic services, and with clear knowledge of scientifically based measures that may shed light on a person's personality and functioning. There are many different types of mental health professionals and some require very little education and experience before licensure. Some are not permitted to administer psychological measures that have been often proven useful in these evaluations for the court. The work product offered to the court may then have very little value and assistance in making determinations.

Given these factors, it is my opinion that the Bill 5505 will undermine the needs of the court and will cause grave damage to the process presently in use. By giving each parent the opportunity to select their own mental health provider, it will slow the process, bring in professionals who may have very little expertise, allow professionals with preconceived biases to render opinions, and may subject the family members to multiple evaluation processes within a short time frame. When each professional presents their opinion to the court, it will likely add more confusion, more conflictual information, and no clear assistance to the court. Bill 5505 offers no assistance to the court that already faces a very difficult role.

Thank you for your time regarding this matter. Feel free to contact me via phone at 860-922-0939 or email at voicesllc@yahoo.com for additional assistance or information.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Inés Schroeder Psy D".

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